

Testimony to Appropriations Committee

March 11, 2010

Terry Jones, Chairman

Working Lands Alliance

Community Investment Act

Working Lands Alliance strongly urges the legislature not to tamper with the CIA!

Background

The program was created in 2005 after lengthy collaboration between citizens and legislators seeking to provide a modest but dependable stream of revenue to enable Connecticut communities to jumpstart quality of life and environment-enhancing projects often overlooked or under funded. Originally proposed for farmland preservation, groups such as Connecticut's Working Lands Alliance took the bold position that the funding should be spread in a wider circle to equally embrace agriculture, historic preservation, open space/environment and affordable housing investments. In addition, it was established that a portion of the document recording fee that funds the program remain in each town for local capital improvement projects.

A Special Fund – Outside the Budget – Directly Benefiting Our Towns & Cities

The Community Investment Act (CIA) has become Connecticut's "little engine that could." In its first four years, well over three hundred projects in 130 towns have benefited from a total investment of almost \$40 million. A majority of these state grants leveraged matching funding from the private sector, municipalities, non-profits, and federal sources. CIA funds have also paid for vital staffing to help manage the array of new programs and to provide technical assistance.

Rural and urban areas alike have benefited. The CIA has protected farmland and open space, restored urban gardens, revived museums and historic structures, and brought farmers markets and affordable housing to our downtowns. The spirit of partnerships working with "fierce cooperation" that gave birth to the CIA has become its ongoing credo.

Connecticut is fortunate that in '05, legislative leaders including Senate President Don Williams and House Speaker Jim Amann worked together to pass the CIA. Our beloved "Dean of the House", the late representative Dick Belden – whose legislative philosophy was the gold standard of evaluating the prudence of every expenditure – was its staunch advocate. Governor Rell signed the bill in a ceremony amidst the apple orchards of Glastonbury, reminding us that Connecticut grown, environmental, and community investments are vital to a healthy future for our children.

We must now assert with passion the need to preserve the integrity of the CIA. Although tempting in the current budget crisis, it should not be ended and the dollars dumped into the general fund – even temporarily. That was the plan when the Connecticut Lottery was diverted from education to the general fund. It never changed back. Dollars from the CIA would contribute less than a tiny fraction of 1% of the general fund. The widespread benefits of directly investing this money (often enhanced by matching funds) in our communities greatly outweigh any short-term gain to the general fund. History teaches us the risk is high that this community investment program would never be re-established.

In these stressful economic times, we must nurture opportunities to invest in the quality of life within our communities. More than ever, we need our green spaces, parks, places of history, affordable housing, farms, and gardens. Healthy food and recreation are even more important to our physical, spiritual, and mental health as the depressing drum of negative economic statistics beats away daily.

Governor Rell and our legislature should not tamper with the CIA. It pays its own way each and every year and leaves our children a legacy of better communities. Like our children, that is a treasure worth nurturing!